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NSC BRIEFING NOTES

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WESTERN DIVISION
15 June 1954

FRENCH GOVERNMENT CRISIS

I. Prolonged French cabinet crisis probable

- A. Premier-designate Mendes-France not likely to win investiture vote
1. Not popular in Assembly;
 2. Popular Republicans and pro-EDC elements in other parties will not accept further delay on EDC.
- B. No clear majority for other candidates yet in sight
- C. Political stands of Mendes-France and other possible candidates
1. Pierre Mendes-France (Radical Socialist)
 - a. Professes to be pro-Atlantic but advocates delaying EDC ratification until economic picture improves considerably;
 - b. Favors direct negotiations with Viet Minh.
 - c. Reported to be aligned with group (including Aitterrand, Robert Schuman and Edgar Faure) which hopes that a really new government would come to power with Socialist help irrespective of party.
 2. George Bidault (Popular Republican)
 - a. Insists on a firm commitment to EDC as the price for his party's participation in a government
 3. Edgar Faure (Radical Socialist)

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- a. Frequently mentioned as Laniel's successor.
- b. Views are close to those of Mendes-France
 - (1) doubts that time is ~~quite~~ ripe for EDC
 - (2) believes American atomic weapons can safeguard Europe at present.
- 4. Rene Mayer (Radical Socialist)
 - a. Pro-EDC
- 5. Robert Schuman (Popular Republican)
 - a. Rumored less strongly pro-EDC than formerly but still favors it; ~~but~~
 - b. Believes EDC compatible with an East-West agreement.
- 6. Antoine Pinay (Independent)
 - a. Moderately pro-EDC; believes it to be best available solution.
 - b. Now ill
- 7. Francois Mitterrand (Resistance Union)
 - a. Increasingly skeptical of EDC;
 - b. Wants more attention to African territories
 - (1) Quit Laniel cabinet on this issue in September, saying "if France is to be a power at all, it will only be because of her African territories."
 - (2) Mitterrand's position has wide appeal to Frenchmen who fear German-dominated Europe:

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2 (a) These believe economic integration of French Union a prerequisite to integration, so France can compete on equal terms with Germany.

(b) These also believe Africa is vital to France's military security;

(1) Source of manpower compensating for France's numerical inferiority in Europe;

(2) Base of military operations as extension of France

c. French public more than ever concerned with security of Africa in view of impending loss of Indochina

D.-----M. Since Laniel advocated firmer Indochina policy than most of Assembly would support, any new government emergency will be under implicit instructions to end war even at cost of major concessions.

(1) Agreement to partition of Vietnam most likely

E.-----M. In other respects, no radical change in French policy likely to emerge from present Assembly.

II. Prospects for new elections:

A. Assembly's care to avoid constitutional majority in overthrowing Laniel indicates it wants to avoid new

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elections (See Appendix on provisions for dissolution and new elections).

B. Trends evident in recent by-elections:

1. Communists held their own or improved ~~their~~ their positions.
2. Socialists failed; after two years in opposition, to wear voters away from Communists
3. Non-Communist parties deeply divided. Only on second ballot did threat of Communist victory drive them together.
4. Gaullists lost ~~heavily~~ heavily--~~supporters~~ supporters moved to center of right

C. By-elections not a valid gauge of national elections

1. By-elections take place on a two-ballot, majority vote system which enables non-Communists to get together between ballots.
2. National elections take place on ~~single~~ single-ballot basis with provisions for electoral affiliations among parties.
3. Hence non-Communists would face more difficulty than in 1951 national election in forming electoral alliances.

D. Tentative indications for national election, if held.

1. Other right wing parties (Mainly Independents) would profit most by Gaullist losses.
2. Popular Republicans confident of gaining also

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3. Communists, who polled 26% of 1951 popular vote, would probalby profit by lack of unity within non-Communist parties on EDC and other issues.

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Appendix: PROVISIONS FOR DISSOLVING FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

- I. National Assembly may dissolve itself at any time by majority vote:**
 - 1. This likely only on eve of regular elections.**
- II. Constitutional provisions for dissolving Assembly by cabinet decision:**
 - A. Cabinet may act only if:**
 - 1. More than 18 months have elapsed since the assembly first convened;**
 - 2. Within a given 18-month period, two governments have been overthrown by an absolute majority (314) on formal votes of confidence.**
 - a. The Mayer government was thus overthrown on 21 May 1953.**
 - 3. Each of the governments thus overthrown had lasted far more than 15 days.**
 - B. Cabinet may then, after consulting with the president of the assembly, formally recommend that the president of the republic dissolve the assembly.**
 - C. The president of the assembly (now Socialist Andre Le Troquer) would then become premier.**
 - D. In conjunction with the Assembly steering committee, he would name a new minister of the interior, who exercises control of the police.**
 - E. All parties in the Assembly would then be given proportional representation in the government through ministers without portfolio.**

1. The Communist Party would thus participate in interim caretaker cabinet.
- F. New elections must be held from 20 to 30 days after dissolution.
- G. New Assembly reconvenes the third Thursday following the elections.